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When thou hast Shut thy Door

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WHEN THOU HAST SHUT THY DOOR

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OR

THE QUIET HOUR

BY

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NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHERS

17711

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SECOND COPY.
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"O Lord, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice; in the morning will I order my prayer to Thee, and will keep watch." — *Psalm v.*, 3.

WHEN THOU HAST SHUT THY DOOR, OR THE QUIET HOUR.

I.

THE MEANING.

The subject of the Quiet Hour is one of the utmost importance in its bearing on the reality of our spiritual life, and on the efficiency of our spiritual work. In dealing with this subject the first question we have to ask is:

What is meant by the Quiet Hour?

The Quiet Hour is the time which all Christians give, or rather, I should say, ought to give, regularly each day to private personal devotion, to private personal communion with God. When we say the Quiet Hour, we do not necessarily mean sixty minutes. Some who have ample leisure

might profitably give more, but the great mass of us cannot possibly give so much. There are thousands of Christians who are thankful if they can rescue from the rush of toil or business thirty or even fifteen minutes regularly for this purpose. After all, it is not the actual time spent that is important; it is the manner in which it is spent.

And when we say the Quiet Hour we do not necessarily mean the morning hour. There is a distinction between the Quiet Hour and the Morning Watch. But while the Quiet Hour does not necessarily mean the morning hour, I would earnestly plead that in the case of as many as possible it should actually mean the morning hour. If God is to be first in our lives, it is important that He should be first in our days. We should strive, as Murray McCheyne used to put it, "to see the face of God before we see the face of man."

Further, when we say the Quiet Hour we mean that the time for personal devotion should be regularly set apart and jealously guarded against all encroachment. It should be looked upon as an

engagement taking precedence of all other engagements. No earthly business should be allowed to interrupt this heavenly business. No appointment with man should be allowed to cancel this appointment with God.

II.

THE PURPOSE.

We have already learned what is meant by the Quiet Hour. We now have to ask the question:

What is the purpose
of the Quiet Hour?

The specific purpose of the Quiet Hour is the development of the contemplative side of our religious nature, and the cultivation of the devout life. The observance of the Quiet Hour is attended by many most happy results. Nothing fits us for work, nothing prepares us for suffering, like fellowship with God. But to fit us for work, or to prepare us for suffering, is not the purpose of the Quiet Hour. Its purpose is to lead us into the presence of God, and to make God real to us.

We shall not be far wrong if we say that the purpose of the Quiet Hour is to produce in our lives these three qualities: —

1. — STILLNESS.

Stillness is always the mark of a deep life. The brook far up in the hill babbles as it leaps towards the plains, but when it has become a mighty river it flows on in absolute silence, even though on its bosom it may be bearing the navies of the world. Stillness is a quality not incompatible with business. The busiest life ever lived on earth, the life of our blessed Lord, was also the one in which there was the most perfect stillness. Stillness is not incompatible with business, but it is incompatible with fussiness; and fussiness is a besetting sin of our age, and one of the worst perils of our spiritual life. Now nothing conquers fussiness like the approach into the presence of God. As we wait on Him we hear Him rebuke our feverish haste and our perpetual craving for action. We hear Him say, "Be still, and know that I am God."

2. — OUTLOOK.

The second quality in our religious life produced by the right observance of the Quiet Hour is what I shall call Outlook. If we are to live the large, free Christian lives God would have us live, we must carry about with us continually a sense of the future. We must never forget that we are eternal. But this sense of the future, this sense of the infiniteness of our destiny, comes only through waiting on God. It is through the fellowship of the Quiet Hour that faith is strengthened until it makes the glory that awaits us a more real thing than the present. The Quiet Hour trains us to look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen. It is this faculty of living in the future to which I have given the name of Outlook. The grace of Outlook, where it exists, has always an immense effect on a man's life. It makes him patient. He can afford to wait, for he has eternity to draw on; he can afford to bear, for the sufferings of the present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed.

And it makes him heavenly minded. He learns to measure his life, not by years, but by millenniums; and as he has years here and millenniums there, what wonder is it if he sets his affections on things above — not on things on the earth?

3. — GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS.

The third quality whose development in the religious life is mightily helped by the observance of the Quiet Hour is God-consciousness. This is the very heart and centre of the spiritual life. We are spiritual men just in the measure in which the thought of God dominates and controls our life. But if the consciousness of God is to be driven deep into our life, until we become as God-conscious as we are self-conscious, we simply must day by day wait on God. Working for God is a blessed means of grace. But as we know, the work must shut God out. There is an element of self ever present in our work; and the more energetically we work, the more strongly the consciousness of self may be developed. It is fellowship, and not

service, which sets us free from self. It was when Enoch walked with God that "he was not." But fellowship, and not service, is the characteristic of the Quiet Hour.

This, then, I believe to be the great purpose of the Quiet Hour — to beget in our lives that stillness which will enable us to hear God's lightest whisper, and thus to know Him Whom to know is eternal life; that outlook which will redeem our lives from all meanness and pettiness, and give us a knowledge of the hope of God's calling, and the infiniteness of our destiny in Him; that God-consciousness which will make our blessed Master so intensely real to us that to us in the fullest sense every day and all the day to live will be Christ.

III.

THE USE.

From the consideration of the meaning and the purpose of the Quiet Hour, we now pass to a question which, because it is the most practical, is for most of us the most important. We ask:

What is the best manner in which to make use of the Quiet Hour?

This is a question which no man can answer for another. There must always be something individual and special in the observance of the Quiet Hour. Each one for himself must discover how he can most profitably occupy the time at his disposal. Still, I would venture to suggest a scheme which may be found useful by some, and which will at least have this advantage, that it will call attention to certain acts of the soul which should always have a place in our private devotion:

DETACHMENT.

1. The Quiet Hour should begin with an act of Detachment. Having, by taking forethought and trouble about it, secured a place where we shall be free from interruption, let us, by a deliberate act of the will, drive out of the mind all worldly thoughts, and bend mind, and heart, and conscience, and will to the work in hand. This act is necessary at the outset if we are to get the most out of the

time at our disposal. It is an act which many find difficult. Some will say that they cannot banish worldly thoughts, that they cannot concentrate their attention. But though we find the work difficult, we must not be discouraged. If the effort is honestly made and persisted in, in dependence upon the Spirit of God, our power over our thoughts will grow until we have them almost completely under control.

Having by the act of detachment secured quietness of soul, we should begin the direct devotion of the Quiet Hour by

RECOLLECTION.

2. An act of Recollection. In this act we deal, not with promises, but with facts. We do not pray or praise. We believe and we affirm. We recall the relation in which we stand to our God. We say: "At this moment, as I bow before God, I am a child of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, quickened and indwelt by the Holy Ghost. At this moment I believe in Jesus Christ, I rest on Him, I love Him, I desire to please Him. And at

this moment God loves me; the Lord is my Keeper; the Holy Ghost is at work making me holy; at this moment God's grace is sufficient for me; all things are working for my good." Let me plead that the act of Recollection be never forgotten. All the other exercises of the Quiet Hour will be greatly helped by it.

But if rightly performed, the act of Recollection will naturally pass into

ADORATION.

3. An act of Adoration, Thanksgiving, and Praise. We cannot think of what our God is without adoring Him; we cannot think of what He has done without offering Him thanksgiving and praise. I think that the act of praise should have an early place in devotion. Nothing prepares the way for prayer like it. The sense of God's greatness and power that is awakened within us as we adore, the sense of His goodness and love which fills our hearts as we praise, makes prayer as natural and as easy as breathing.

But with the vision of God there always comes the vision of self; so the act of Adoration is followed by

CONFESSION.

4. An act of Confession. We pass inevitably from praising God for His goodness to us to bemoaning ourselves for our waywardness and coldheartedness towards Him. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, immediately he cried, "Woe is me!" When the vision of God broke on Job, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes. We have not rightly used the Quiet Hour if it has not brought us some measure of contrition. Let us seek from God always as we approach Him the grace of penitence, and real sorrow before Him because of our transgressions and our sins. And let our confession ever be honest and full. There is no progress in the spiritual life possible if we are not absolutely honest with God about our present condition.

But if the act of Confession is not to depress and discourage us, it must be followed by

FAITH.

5. An act of Faith. In this we accept anew the full and free forgiveness of our God. Having confessed our sins, we wait in silence before Him until by the Holy Ghost these words come with new power to us: "I have blotted out as a cloud thy transgressions, and as a thick cloud thy sins;" "Go in peace;" and there comes stealing over the soul a fresh sense of the infiniteness of the Divine grace and the perfection of the atonement made for our sins. The way is now open for

BIBLE-STUDY.

6. The Reading and Study of the Word of God. It is surely needless to insist upon the absolute importance of giving to the Word of God a prominent, indeed, a preëminent place in the Quiet Hour. We might as well try to live our natural life without food as our spiritual life without the Word of God. If we are to be spiritually healthy and strong, we must let the Word of God dwell in us richly. And our study of it must have these

marks about it if it is to profit us: — (*a*) It must be *direct.* We must read and study the Bible itself, not merely books about the Bible, or even extracts from the Bible. Meditations on the Bible, such as those of Spurgeon and others, are invaluable; extracts from the Bible, such as those in "Daily Light," are simply priceless; but they must never be allowed to take the place of the Bible as God gave it to us. (*b*) It must be *systematic.* Some definite line of study should be carefully chosen beforehand, and then regularly followed out, so that the effect of our study may be cumulative. Care should be taken not to attempt too much at one time. "Thorough" must be our motto in the study of the Bible. (*c*) It must be *in dependence on the Spirit of God.* We must remember that He Who at first gave the Word must give the Word to us if it is to be spirit and life to our souls.

On the reading of the Word of God there should follow

MEDITATION.

7. Meditation. Some time, however small, should be given to this. Better read less of the Word than omit meditation on what has been read. In meditation we let the Word soak into the mind. It is through meditation that we make it really our own. In meditation we inwardly digest the Word, we seize on its truths, and take them to be our guide and our comfort for the day.

Following the meditation there comes

PRAYER.

8. Prayer. As we set ourselves to pray there must be a remembrance of the conditions of prevailing prayer. They are such as these: (1) Heart-separation from sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." (2) Righteousness. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (3) Faith. "He that cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (4) Submission. "If we ask anything according

to His will He heareth us." (5) Thankfulness. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." In addition to these let us ever remember that prayer to prevail must be God-wrought. It must be "in the Holy Ghost," and "in the Name of Jesus."

I think that usually prayer should follow reading. We should hear God speak to us before we speak to God. And it will often be found helpful to base our prayers on the words that we have read. If in the passage sins are mentioned which we have tolerated in our life, we pray that these may be removed. If in the passage certain graces and virtues are inculcated, we pray that they may appear in our lives. The supreme advantage of this method of prayer is, that we then know that what we pray for is in the line of God's will, and thus have the infallible assurance that we shall be heard.

After prayer will naturally come

INTERCESSION.

9. Intercession. This is the holiest, as it is the most difficult, exercise of the Quiet Hour. Intercession is the highest form of prayer, and the power to intercede effectively is something to be earnestly coveted and eagerly striven for. Intercession, like prayer, has its conditions. (1) It must be intelligent. We cannot rightly intercede for those of whom we know nothing. Intercession by proxy, as it has been called, is far too common. I question if it avails much. (2) It must be purposeful. A great theologian has laid it down as a principle that we have no right to intercede for any one whom we are not personally prepared to serve should the occasion call for it. (3) It must be detailed. The best fruit is hand-gathered. But that means that it is taken one by one. (4.) It must be importunate, patient, and continued. True intercession is that which takes no refusal, but pleads with the Friend, and continues pleading, until He arises and gives what is needed.

Intercession, like reading, is greatly helped by

forethought. The more we learn the art of Intercession, the wider will the sphere of our intercession become; and the wider the sphere becomes the more impossible it becomes to deal with it all at one time. The difficulty thus created will be met by arrangement beforehand. Some themes will be chosen for continual intercession, and will never be omitted. Others will be taken up at certain times and laid before God. I would plead earnestly for much intercession. I believe that what the Church needs to-day more than anything else is men and women who can take hold of God, and obtain the forthputting of His power for the blessing of this world.

In Intercession the exercises of the Quiet Hour naturally reach their climax; but ere we close and go forth to face the toil and rush of the day I think that there should be

CONSECRATION.

10. An act of Consecration and Committal. I, the child of God, have been in my Father's pres-

ence. He has been speaking to me, and I to Him. The fellowship has been direct, personal, and sweet, — a foretaste of heaven. And now I am going out into a world where He is hated, where His Name is profaned and His people despised. So ere I go I put myself once more under the shadow of His wings, and hear Him say: "The Lord is thy Keeper, the Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and forevermore." And then with a smile on my face and a peace that passes understanding in my heart, I go out to let my light shine before men, that they may see my good works, and glorify my Father Who is in heaven.

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